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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 001784

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ECON](#) [SY](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: JORDAN AND SYRIA FORMALLY END BORDER DISPUTE, BUT TENSIONS REMAIN

REF: A. AMMAN 1651

[B](#). 04 AMMAN 9484

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The Prime Ministers of Jordan and Syria signed a raft of agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) in Amman on February 28, including an agreement formally demarcating the border between the two countries. Despite this public display of mutual cooperation, the GOJ retains serious concerns about the flow of terrorists and weapons into Jordan from Syria, as well as Syrian behavior elsewhere in the region. End Summary.

ALL SMILES IN PUBLIC

[1](#)2. (U) A two-day visit to Amman by a high-level Syrian government delegation headed by Prime Minister Mohammad Najji Al Otari culminated in the formal signing of bilateral agreements on February 28. Otari and Jordanian PM Faisal al-Fayez penned their names to 21 agreements and MOUs covering bilateral cooperation in a variety of fields, including commerce and industry, science, agriculture, law enforcement, and anti-terrorism. The centerpiece of the ceremony, however, was a document demarcating the long-disputed border between Syria and Jordan. This agreement, hammered out by negotiating teams in November 2004 (ref b), puts and end to Syrian control of approximately 125 square kilometers of Jordanian territory, much of it occupied since "Black September" 1970. The Jordanians in return will give back roughly 2.5 square kilometers of Syrian land along the border.

[1](#)3. (U) A day before the signing, Jordanian Interior Minister Samir Habashneh acknowledged to reporters that the border issue had been "an irritant" to bilateral relations that caused "a non-chronic headache from time to time." He asserted that the agreement would "guarantee" that no future territorial infringements would take place. Syrian Interior Minister Ghazi Kanaan added that the document would "return the rights of peoples and secure their interests" while "rebuilding trust" between the two countries.

GROWING TRADE TIES

[1](#)4. (U) Otari's visit was marked by numerous public exchanges of upbeat quotes and accolades for Jordanian-Syrian "brotherhood." Officials highlighted the rapid growth in bilateral trade between Jordan and Syria in recent years, especially since the implementation of a 2001 free trade agreement. According to press statements, joint commercial exchanges reached 241 million Jordanian dinars (USD 337 million) in 2004 -- JD 147 million (USD 206 million) in Jordanian imports from Syria and JD 94 million (USD 132 million) in Jordanian domestic exports to Syria. Adding in re-exports brings the 2004 bilateral trade total up to JD 254 million (USD 356 million).

COMMENT

[1](#)5. (C) The Syrian delegation's visit to Jordan comes at a time of continued tension between the two capitals. The GOJ remains deeply troubled by the flow of weapons and trouble-makers crossing into Jordan from Syria. Serious concerns also persist in Amman about Syria's approach to Israeli-Palestinian issues, Iraq and Lebanon. The GOJ's recent blunt admonitions to Damascus on compliance with UNSCR 1559 (ref a) were reflected in King Abdullah's meeting with Otari, during which the press quoted him as saying that Jordan supported the implementation of "international resolutions" and was keenly interested in preserving Lebanon's "unity, sovereignty and security."

HALE